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Alex Clark

Political activist, arts administrator and election agent for Hugh MacDiarmid;
Born January 2, 1922;
Died June 6, 2008.

ALEX Clark, who has died aged 86, was a former communist whose political outlook was forged by the injustices he witnessed working in the pits, and who went on to play a crucial role in Scottish cultural life.

A founder of what became Glasgow's Mayfest, he was also election agent for Hugh MacDiarmid when the poet stood in Perth and Kinross against Sir Alec Douglas-Home in 1964. A keen admirer of MacDiarmid's work, he went on to speak movingly at his funeral.

Clark was the oldest child in a family of seven boys and three girls. He attended school at Swinhill, Shawburn and Larkhall Academy and although they were never wealthy, the family grew very rich in other ways. Happy childhoods led to a very close-knit family, which remained together throughout the decades that followed.

His father, also Alex, was a working miner, while mother Annie kept the family in order. Both parents were good singers, and many nights were spent in the home with all the family involved in a sing-song. He had fine tenor voice and during the war years spent much of his spare time singing at concerts for the forces.

Clark started work first as a grain miller in 1936, then moved into mining with his father when he was about 17. In 1939, tragedy struck when John, Clark's younger brother, was killed in an accident at Swinhill pit. When he went to collect John's wages he discovered his brother had just been paid for half the shift that he was on when he was killed. This miserly attitude to workers who had given

their lives coloured much of Clark's life in the future.

He moved to work in Douglas Colliery, known locally as Ponceigh, but before leaving Larkhall had become a member of the Communist Party, and on moving to Rigside he joined many other communists in one of the biggest branches of the party in Scotland.

During this period, he met and married Jessie McCulloch in 1946. Their Rigside home became famous as a centre of political activity, and also the scene for many excellent parties. Later the rest of the family moved to the area, where at one time there were five of the brothers in the same pit. Clark was active in the Co-op Board, and in the NUM, as well as being branch secretary of the Communist Party with at that time over 100 members. He also organised cultural events, brought theatre groups to the village and organised trips to concerts and the opera in Glasgow.

In 1953, Clark was asked to work full-time for the Communist Party, moving first to Stirlingshire as organiser, then to Glasgow in a new capacity as secretary of the party. He later became the Scottish organiser, and that was what led to his association with Hugh MacDiarmid. In 1964 the nationalist poet stood as the Communist candidate in Perth and Kinross against the then prime minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Defeat was inevitable. Clark remained a friend and admirer of MacDiarmid and in 1978 gave the oration at his funeral.

In the mid 1960s Clark was for a time seriously ill, as a result of which he had a lung removed and while this curtailed his singing somewhat, it did not stop him working.

In 1969 he became the Scottish and Northern Ireland secretary of Equity, the actors'



in his capacity as Equity secretary he battled within the trade union movement to achieve this.

Clark worked with many people in the trade union movement to set up Glasgow's International Festival of the

Arts, which became Mayfest. Clark was a founder member and later became honorary president. He argued in the STUC that there should be an arts officer for the organisation and when it was finally agreed, it was natural that

WORKING MAN: Alex Clark helped found what became Glasgow's Mayfest.

Clark was offered the post. He accepted gladly and set about contacting unions, trades councils, churches, councils and businesses to get them involved in spreading the cultural message throughout the country.

One of his favourite quotes at that time was from William Morris, who said: "I don't want art for a few, any more than I want education for a few, or freedom for a few." His dedication to his work brought recognition in the form of the Lord Provost's Award for Public Service to Glasgow. Later, he was further recognised when he won an award of £10,000 from the Goodman Awards for the Arts. He gave £8000 to the Glasgow Film Theatre and £2000 to the Arran Theatre Trust.

His list of directorships was impressive; they included Mayfest, the Jazz Festival, as well as the aforementioned GFT and ATT. He was also a trustee of the James Milne Memorial and the Hugh MacDiarmid Memorial Trust. In 1995 he was offered an MBE but turned it down.

Clark never really retired and when he moved to Arran he became one of CalMac's best customers, travelling to meetings of the Arts Council the STUC, and visiting the theatre whenever he could.

When he lived in Glasgow he had a lovely garden in Albert Road, and while on Arran he set about developing a beautiful garden which was his and Jessie's pride and joy.

He liked to go to the race from time to time and enjoy a few trips to York for that reason. He followed with interest Scotland's football progress but his main interest in the field was the junior game, particularly Larkhall Thistle at later Pollok Juniors.

Clark leaves Jessie, his wife of more than 60 years, six sons and daughters Catherine, two grandsons and three great-grandchildren.

ANDREW CLAI

An ambassador for union culture

ALEX CLARK honours the life of a dedicated trade unionist and communist

ALEX Clark, who died last Friday, was one of a dedicated band of people who left paid employment in the 1950s to take up a much riskier job as a full-time Communist Party worker.

He was a miner, and branch secretary of one of the biggest Communist Party branches in the country with over 100 members. Party officials asked him to take up the post of Stirlingshire organiser, where he did a good job — so much so that he was then asked to move to Glasgow as the secretary for the city, following which he became Scottish organiser until 1959.

He was always interested in and fought for a widening of cultural de-

velopments in the movement. As an NUM branch secretary, he organised outings to the theatre and even brought drama to his village at one time with the Theatre Workers.

This led to his becoming the Scottish and Northern Ireland secretary of the actors' union Equity, where he developed contacts with trades councils, local and regional councils, churches and businesses, as well as other trade unions, to encourage young poets and dramatists and for their work to be seen and heard in the movement.

His efforts to widen

trade union interest in this field eventually led to the STUC setting up a post for arts officer. It was the most natural thing in the world for them to ask him to take up the post.

In this job he continued to work with all sorts of bodies to encourage cultural development. His favourite quote at that time was from William Morris, who said: "I don't want art for a few any more than I want education for a few or freedom for a few."

In 1987, he received the Lord Provost's Award for Service to the People of Glasgow. He

was offered an MBE in 1995 which he refused.

He was a willing and dedicated worker for the only daily paper of the left, the Daily Worker, later the Morning Star.

At very difficult times for the paper, in the 1980s, he took the chair at PPS meetings and became a member of its management committee.

He leaves his wife of more than 60 years, Jessie, son Sandy, daughter Catherine, two grand-children and three great-grandchildren.

His funeral is at the Linn Crematorium in Glasgow, at 1.30pm tomorrow.

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